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TS #185752-b

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Probable Communist Reactions to Certain US or US-Sponsored Courses of Action in Vietnam and Laos

PROPOSED COURSES OF ACTION*

CATEGORY 1. Air raids upon key supply centers along the Viet Cong supply and infiltration corridor in the Laos panhandle, these raids to be conducted by the VNAF, possibly using napalm [redacted] 25X1

CATEGORY 2. Ground force cross-border raids on the same targets by GVN units up to battalion in size and perhaps accompanied by US advisors.

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* These descriptions of proposed courses of action are abbreviated summaries of the courses spelled out in the JCS Memorandum devoted to this subject.

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CATEGORY 3. Limited air strikes against specific military and transportation targets in North Vietnam by unmarked planes flown exclusively by non-US aircrews.

1. In response to the first or second categories of action, local Communist military forces in the areas of actual attack would react vigorously, but we believe that none of the Communist powers involved would respond with major military moves designed to change the nature of the conflict. Rather than risk escalation, which must appear to them unnecessary and potentially disastrous to long-term achievement of their objectives, they would be more likely to rely on a continuing war of attrition and on intensive propaganda and political maneuvering aimed at isolating the US and building up pressure for an international conference to "neutralize" South Vietnam. In any event, the intensity of Communist response to Category 1 and 2 actions would depend to some extent upon the scale and manner in which such actions were executed.

2. Air strikes on North Vietnam itself (Category 3) would evoke sharper Communist reactions than air strikes confined to targets in Laos, but even in this case fear of escalation

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would probably restrain the Communists from a major military response. Though we think it unlikely, they might attempt isolated air raids on Saigon and other South Vietnamese cities hoping quickly to shatter South Vietnamese morale.

3. There are various local military or semi-military actions, short of major change in the character of the conflict, which should be considered among possible Communist responses:

(a) Improvement of local air defenses (probably with additional AA equipment from North Vietnam and China), dispersal of supplies and troop concentrations, and movement discipline designed to hamper effective air attack. Such measures would be likely.

(b) Intensification of Viet Cong ambushes and attacks, accompanied perhaps by the more or less covert introduction into South Vietnam of some additional personnel from North Vietnam. This response also would be likely.

(c) Sabotage attacks on airfields in South Vietnam to damage their communications facilities, POL depots, etc., and if possible to cripple planes on the ground. We believe such attacks likely.

(d) A widespread campaign of terrorism against Americans, including civilians and dependents, in South Vietnam. We think the chances of such a campaign would be less than even.

(e) Communist forces now in Laos could attempt to seize one or more of the Mekong towns. We believe such an attempt would be unlikely.

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(f) Fighter aircraft would be introduced into North Vietnam. We think this unlikely if US/GVN air strikes are confined to targets in Laos (Category 1). However, if attacks are initiated against North Vietnam itself (Category 3), chances of the Communists introducing some defensive air capability in North Vietnam would increase appreciably, mounting as the scope and intensity of the attacks increased.

4. The influence of the USSR on the Communist camp in the Indochina situation is limited, and it wants to avoid too direct involvement. Moscow would certainly want to show itself no less strong than the Chinese in opposition to the US-sponsored moves. It would almost certainly consider that an intense international campaign against the US could damage US interests considerably, to Soviet world-wide gain, and would not necessarily jeopardize Soviet detente tactics on issues of US-Soviet relations other than Vietnam. Accordingly, the Soviets would give Hanoi vigorous political and propaganda support, and would probably place themselves in the forefront of those calling for an international conference -- and might accompany this by leading a move in the UN to condemn the US.

John A. McCone
Director

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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : AD/NE

DATE: 27 July 1964

25X1 **FROM** : [redacted]

SUBJECT: Memorandum for DCI on Communist Reactions

Here is the typescript you requested for this afternoon's meeting with McG. Bundy.

Please let me know whether you want a further mimeographed edition, when, and under what heading so I can have reproduction properly alerted.

[redacted]

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